



State of North Carolina  
Office of the Governor

---

For Release: **IMMEDIATE**  
Date: Feb. 14, 2006

Contact: Sherri Johnson  
Phone: 919/733-5612

---

**GOV. EASLEY ENCOURAGES NORTH CAROLINIANS TO PROTECT THEIR HEARTS  
FOR VALENTINE'S DAY**

**RALEIGH** – Gov. Mike Easley is encouraging North Carolinians to use Valentine's Day as an opportunity check up on their heart health. Make sure your next medical examination includes cholesterol and blood pressure screenings, and commit to eat smart and move more.

"Valentine's Day is always focused on love and letting loved ones know you care," said Easley. "You can do that by making sure your heart, and those of the ones you love, is healthy."

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in North Carolina. In 2003, more than 18,600 citizens died as a result of heart disease. Stroke is the third leading cause of death, accounting for more than 5,100 deaths in 2003. Heart disease and stroke can be caused by high blood pressure and/or high cholesterol. Women may not realize that these diseases affect them disproportionately; cardiovascular disease claims the lives of more women in our state than the next six leading causes of death combined, including cancer.

Since high blood pressure may not have any symptoms, often the only way to find out if you have this disease is to get your blood pressure checked. At minimum, everyone should have their blood pressure tested every two years. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your body; a certain amount of cholesterol is normal and actually helps your body function. But too much cholesterol can cause heart disease. High cholesterol may also have no symptoms, so all adults over age 20 should have a blood cholesterol test at least once every five years.

As recommended by the state's "Eat Smart, Move More" program, everyone should eat healthier and be physically fit by:

- Enjoying a variety of fruits and vegetables. Make fruits and vegetables half your plate at each meal.
- Eating a variety of grain products, particularly whole grains.
- Choosing foods that are low in saturated fats such as nuts, leaner meats and dairy foods.
- Picking prepared foods that are low in trans fats. Manufacturers are now required to list trans fats on the nutritional label.